



**National Center for Homeless Education**  
Supporting the Education of Children  
and Youth Experiencing Homelessness  
<https://nche.ed.gov>



## **Providing Wraparound Services Under the American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth Program**

This NCHE brief

- provides an overview of the requirements to provide wraparound services for children and youth experiencing homelessness in the American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) program;
- discusses the ways that ARP-HCY funds have expanded the services that state educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) are able to provide to children and youth experiencing homelessness;
- describes the opportunities and challenges for SEAs and LEAs in partnering with community-based organizations (CBOs) and providing wraparound services for children and youth experiencing homelessness;
- lists strategies to build SEA and LEA Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program capacity to provide wraparound services; and
- spotlights examples of SEA initiatives to provide wraparound services for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

### **ARP-HCY and Wraparound Services**

On March 11, 2021, President Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) (HR 1319, Sec. 2001)<sup>1</sup> which included an \$800 million reservation within the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund to address the specific and urgent needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness, in light of the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the purposes of identifying children and youth experiencing homelessness and enabling them to attend school and participate fully in school activities, the law specifically mentions providing children and youth experiencing homelessness with wraparound services. These services include those that address the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of these children and youth.

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) awarded these funds to SEAs in two disbursements: ARP Homeless I (allocated in April of 2021) and ARP Homeless II (allocated in July of 2021). For both ARP Homeless I and ARP Homeless II funds, states were required to allocate not less than 75% of the funding to LEAs via subgrants.<sup>2</sup> SEAs were allowed to utilize up to 25% of the funding from each installment for state-level activities to support training, technical assistance, capacity-building, and engagement at the state and LEA levels. The availability of ARP-HCY funds ends in 2025.

<sup>1</sup> View the full statute of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021: <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr1319/BILLS-117hr1319enr.pdf>. For additional information on the ARP-HCY program, view the ED ARP-HCY program web page: <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/american-rescue-plan/american-rescue-plan-elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-homeless-children-youth-arp-hcy/>. Also, view the ARP-HCY resources page of the National Center for Homeless Education: <https://nche.ed.gov/legislation/arp/>.

<sup>2</sup> See the ARP Final Requirements at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-07-09/pdf/2021-14705.pdf>.

In a Dear Colleague Letter issued April 23, 2021, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona emphasized the importance of using these funds to provide wraparound services for children and youth experiencing homelessness, stating that these services “could be provided in collaboration with and/or through contracts with community-based organizations, and could include academic supports, trauma-informed care, social-emotional support, and mental health services...” (Cardona, 2021). While not defined in the ARP, wraparound services is a term originally used in the fields of behavioral or mental health and commonly used to mean a child- or youth-centered approach to providing services in a comprehensive and holistic way by a team made up of professionals working in partnership with supportive people in the child’s life like parents, friends, and relatives (VanDenBerg, Bruns, & Burchard, 2008). In addition to the supports mentioned in the Dear Colleague Letter, wraparound services for children and youth experiencing homelessness could include an agency and service navigators to assist with accessing community services, social and medical services provided on-site at schools, and school resources for basic needs and daily living. Some examples of services that are specifically geared to children, youth, and families that lack stable housing are school-based food pantries, hygiene item closets, laundries, and lounges with small kitchen appliances. While services can be provided in a variety of locations, services on site at schools are particularly beneficial because students have more time to have personal interactions with school staff and build trusted relationships in a safe and inviting atmosphere that will increase their school engagement.

ED has reinforced that wraparound services provided through ARP-HCY funds must be focused on students who meet the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homeless<sup>3</sup> and do not include services that only benefit parents. Parents and other family/household members can incidentally benefit from an LEA providing funded services for eligible students but should not be included in calculations of direct beneficiaries when determining whether a use of funds is reasonable and necessary.<sup>4</sup> Also, services should be educationally related; they should not be unrelated services, like providing transportation to and from a weekend job. One key question to consider is whether a proposed service would enable the student to come to school and be ready to learn.

Additionally, there is an emphasis in the ARP-HCY program to ensure services are targeted toward children and youth experiencing homelessness who are members of historically underserved populations. In particular, the Dear Colleague Letter mentions rural children and youth, Tribal children and youth, students of color, children and youth with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQ+<sup>5</sup> youth, and pregnant, parenting, or caregiving students experiencing homelessness as those that are more difficult to identify as homeless and may not receive the services they need (Cardona, 2021). In fact, each state was required, in developing its ARP-HCY state plan<sup>6</sup> to describe how it will collaborate with community-based organizations (CBOs) to increase identification of students experiencing homelessness among these subgroups and connect them to educationally related support and wraparound services. States may identify and prioritize historically underserved populations of students experiencing homelessness that are not expressly mentioned in the Dear Colleague Letter.

ED also required SEAs to describe in their state plans how they will encourage LEAs to contract with CBOs to help identify and support these students. Although the ARP does not define *community-based organizations*, the term as defined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act means “a public or private nonprofit organization of demonstrated effectiveness that— (A) is representative of a community or significant segments of a community; and (B) provides educational or related services to individuals in the community” (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 7801(5)). CBOs include a wide variety of service providers, educational institutions, civic organizations, clinics, associations, coalitions, and others. A CBO differs from a state or local agency which resides in “the executive branch of a State, municipality, or other political subdivision of a State, or an agency or department...” (Government Organization and Employees, 5 U.S.C. §

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<sup>3</sup> The McKinney-Vento Act refers to Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, reauthorized in 2015 by Title IX of the Every Student Succeeds Act (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.). The McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homeless includes “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” The entire definition can be viewed at <https://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento-definition/>.

<sup>4</sup> See the Uniform Guidance: Uniform Administrative Requirements, 2 C.F.R. § 200.403 and 2 C.F.R. § 200.404 referenced at the end of the document for explanations of the terms *reasonable* and *necessary*.

<sup>5</sup> LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and others.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on the state plans, see NCHS’s “An Overview of ARP-HCY State Plans” at <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/ARP-HCY-State-Plan-Summary.pdf>.

1501(2)).

Recently, ED clarified that faith-based organizations can be considered CBOs under ARP-HCY; however, faith-based organizations serving as CBOs under the program may not discriminate against a beneficiary or prospective beneficiary based on religious beliefs or refusal to participate in a religious practice (Eligibility of Faith-based Organizations for a Subgrant and Non-discrimination Against Those Agencies, 1980; Contracting with Faith-based Organizations and Non-discrimination, 2014).<sup>7</sup>

### **SEAs and LEAs Providing Wraparound Services Through the ARP-HCY Program: Opportunities**

SEAs and LEAs are required by the McKinney-Vento Act to remove educational barriers for children and youth experiencing homelessness. With ARP-HCY funds, SEAs can now greatly expand their Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) programs to address the educationally related needs of these children and youth. Those working in the field of homeless education have long acknowledged that children and youth experiencing homelessness who have their basic needs met are more able to benefit from educational services. EHCY programs are required to link students experiencing homelessness to programs and community resources, but ARP-HCY funds enable LEAs and schools to provide a wider range of services more immediately to these students.

As states developed their ARP-HCY plans, many proposed to add on to services that were already being provided in the schools, both those prior to ESSER and those supported by ESSER<sup>8</sup> funds. Supplementing ESSER-funded services with ARP-HCY funds can both increase the number of children and youth served and target services specifically to students experiencing homelessness. For example, if ARP ESSER is funding a summer school program, ARP-HCY funds can be used to expand the program specifically to serve more children and youth experiencing homelessness. However, it is worth noting that the McKinney-Vento Act prohibits separating students experiencing homelessness from other students in services provided on school grounds (42 U.S.C. §11433(a)(2)(b)), and therefore, ARP-HCY funds cannot be used in ways that serve students experiencing homelessness apart from their housed peers, thereby stigmatizing them on the basis of their homelessness. States also initiated new programs with ARP-HCY funds that specifically target children and youth experiencing homelessness, such as creating hotel-based or shelter-based learning spaces for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Also, while EHCY state coordinators and local homeless liaisons have historically developed state and community partnerships, the ARP requirements for wraparound services and the opportunity to contract with CBOs in providing such services have enabled SEAs and LEAs to explore a wide range of providers and develop new partnerships that are likely to last beyond the ARP-HCY program.

### **SEAs and LEAs Providing Wraparound Services Through the ARP-HCY Program: Initial Steps**

As with any new program, along with opportunities come challenges. From December 2021 through February 2022, NCHE hosted three ad hoc groups for EHCY program state coordinators to discuss providing wraparound services, including partnering with CBOs. Those conversations featured two frequently cited challenges and the following suggested strategies:

- SEAs and LEAs that had not previously worked with CBOs faced challenges identifying organizations and creating new partnerships with them. To overcome this, some created resource lists showing each organization and the services they provide. Others created templates for LEAs and offered training to guide the formation of and the best practices for working as collaborative partners. Several SEAs formed communities of practice allowing staff of all agencies to meet and discover the best ways to

<sup>7</sup> More information about working with faith-based CBOs is available in the ED's EHCY & ARP-HCY Monitoring and Uses of Funds webinar slides at [https://oese.ed.gov/files/2022/03/ARP-HCY-Monitoring-and-Use-of-Funds\\_vFINAL-508.pdf](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2022/03/ARP-HCY-Monitoring-and-Use-of-Funds_vFINAL-508.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> The ED Fact Sheet explains that the ARP ESSER Fund required ED to reserve \$800 million to support efforts to identify homeless children and youth and provide them with comprehensive wraparound services that address needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and allow them to attend school and participate fully in all school activities. The fact sheet can be found at [https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/03/FINAL\\_ARP-ESSER-FACT-SHEET.pdf](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/03/FINAL_ARP-ESSER-FACT-SHEET.pdf).

work together. SEAs also invited CBOs to present at LEA trainings, and some state coordinators serve on advisory boards for CBOs.

- Some CBOs were unfamiliar with issues and needs related to children and youth experiencing homelessness and their education. One approach used by several LEAs to bring CBOs up to speed was to share community needs assessments that highlighted the greatest gaps in service to show where their services were most needed. Some state coordinators invited representatives from CBOs to attend LEA trainings; others presented on the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness at CBO advisory board meetings or other meetings.

### **SEAs and LEAs Providing Wraparound Services Through the ARP-HCY Program: Strategies to Build SEA and LEA Capacity to Provide Wraparound Services**

ARP-HCY state plans included the following strategies to build the capacity of SEAs and LEAs to provide wraparound services for children and youth experiencing homelessness and partner with CBOs:

- Increase SEA program staff participation on advisory boards, coalitions, and councils.
- Convene agencies and providers or create communities of practice that focus on issues related to children and youth experiencing homelessness.
- Explore models for providing wraparound services on site at schools, such as the Full-Service Community Schools model.<sup>9</sup>
- Conduct awareness campaigns to familiarize families and organizations with educational and other services available to children and youth experiencing homelessness.
- Include guest speakers from agencies and service providers in LEA trainings to increase awareness of support services.
- Encourage LEAs to partner with CBOs by providing extra points in the scoring rubric for subgrant applications that specifically include CBO partnerships.
- Develop statewide resource directories or online portals to enable LEAs to access information on resources for children and families experiencing homelessness.
- Hire community navigators in the SEA to develop partnerships with agencies and CBOs and to help LEAs connect with organizations to provide wraparound services for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

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<sup>9</sup> The Full-Service Community Schools program provides support for the planning, implementation, and operation of full-service community schools that improve the coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for children attending high-poverty schools. More information is on the ED's website at <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-discretionary-grants-support-services/school-choice-improvement-programs/full-service-community-schools-program-fscs/>.

## State Spotlights

The following state spotlights are examples from interviews with state coordinators and from a review of ARP-HCY state plans<sup>10</sup> that feature a variety of ways states are expanding their capacity to provide wraparound services for children and youth experiencing homelessness. For more information about these highlighted strategies, contact the state coordinator.<sup>11</sup>

### Louisiana

#### Goal: Expand access to and provision of mental health support to students

In Louisiana, LEAs are encouraged to utilize ARP-HCY funding for contracts with mental health counselors. Multiple LEAs have done this by having their case managers work closely with contracted licensed professional counselors (LPCs) to provide wraparound services for students and families. LEAs identify students during the initial intake, through data review, or by school staff referrals. In some LEAs, school social workers meet with the students to provide mental health support. When the need is beyond what the social workers can provide, students are referred to community counseling agencies for additional support, such as providing trauma services and social emotional learning, supporting parents, and collaborating with staff and guardians to identify needs and provide clinical assessments. Students can meet with mental health counselors virtually, at home, or in the counselor's office.

In other LEAs, during the intake process, the EHCY staff provides a description of identified wraparound services that families can access. EHCY staff can initiate a referral to a contracted LPC to follow up with families who note any needed mental health services. The LPC assesses the student's needs and provides counseling services or refers the student/family to an outside counseling agency. Services include conducting intake interviews with students, family members, and/or relevant school staff; providing an initial assessment and treatment plan; providing individual and small group therapy to students in the school setting; providing clinical support and guidance to parents and caregivers; engaging in active outreach with school staff, parents/caregivers, and community resources; and regular collaboration and consultation with school staff, related to caseload and social-emotional issues.

The pandemic caused a great deal of isolation and eliminated a lot of the academic support needed for students experiencing homelessness. Acknowledging that serving the whole child will prepare students for greater success, 12 LEAs budgeted over \$1.3 million toward wraparound services that included mental health. The state coordinator believes that schools must start at the bottom levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and work their way up to have the greatest impact on leveling the achievement gaps that widened during the past two years.

<sup>10</sup> Link to ARP-HCY state plans: <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/american-rescue-plan/american-rescue-plan-elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-homeless-children-youth-arp-hcy/arp-hcy-state-plans/>.

<sup>11</sup> A list of state coordinators' contact information is available at <https://nche.ed.gov/data/>.

## Idaho

### Goal: Expand the Communities in Schools Model<sup>1</sup>

By sitting on multiple boards and commissions, the Idaho state coordinator had a number of relationships already in place prior to the ARP. She was able to expand these relationships with ARP-HCY funding to build a broader collaborative around providing wraparound services. The SEA held listening sessions with LEAs, state agencies, mental health organizations, parents, higher education, juvenile justice, law enforcement, and other statewide stakeholder groups. These listening sessions enabled the SEA to gain a better understanding of available resources and to provide cross training. Moreover, various agencies and district leaders shared examples of collaborating to distribute food and provide access to medical and dental services within the school setting or community/school resource centers. The listening sessions resulted in several recommendations to guide the SEA in providing resources, training, technical assistance, and leadership to LEAs. Some of the recommendations focused on improving the capacity of school staff who work with students and families experiencing trauma by increasing mental health awareness through professional development and improving SEL support by implementing the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) framework.<sup>2</sup> This stakeholder group also supported imbedding community services for students and their families in school settings. In addition to developing recommendations, the listening sessions fostered relationships, strengthened partnerships, increased awareness of community-based resources, and created opportunities for cross-training.

The Idaho Coalition for Community Schools and the United Way convene a monthly community of practice and have helped to establish community/school resource centers throughout the state. These centers help McKinney-Vento and ARP-HCY grantees meet the needs of students and their families, resulting in improvements in academics, well-being, and mental health.

These coordinated efforts led to a partnership among Idaho Coalition for Community Schools, Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation, the United Way of Treasure Valley, the Idaho Children's Trust Fund, and the National Center for Community Schools. This partnership offered planning grants to LEAs for technical assistance in developing the Community Schools strategy. Cohort A, which started in January 2022, was made up of ten schools/LEAs to strengthen the strategies they were currently implementing. Cohort B, which began in March 2022, included ten new schools/LEAs who were in the exploratory phase of implementation. Four technical assistance sessions were held throughout April and May with the goal for the schools to develop their strategy and prepare to hire a full-time Community School Coordinator by the start of the 2022-23 school year. Additional rounds of these planning grants are being developed to increase the network of support for students and families in each region of the state. The state coordinator explained, "The results of these coordinated efforts have changed the supports for students from 'random acts of kindness' to more targeted and comprehensive wraparound services."

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<sup>1</sup> More information about Communities in Schools is available at <https://www.communitiesinschools.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information about CASEL, visit <https://casel.org/>.

## Conclusion

The ARP-HCY funding has prompted SEAs, LEAs, other state and local agencies, and CBOs to consider new ways of serving children and youth experiencing homelessness. They have responded to ED's suggestions and encouragement with creative ideas to provide support – including educationally related wraparound services – directly and in collaboration with CBOs. Where services were non-existent or siloed, partnerships are being built. Where collaborations already existed, they are being strengthened as diverse groups unite to find workable solutions to overcome long-standing barriers to academic and life success for all children and youth experiencing homelessness. As one state coordinator stated, "It's time to dream big!" The combination of ARP funding (which exceeds the past ten years of appropriations), big dreams, and coordinated, inter-disciplinary efforts means that more students than ever across the country are now receiving a full range of comprehensive services.

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